

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8402

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, US

SUBJECT: CALL ON MARONITE RELIGIOUS LEADER CHARBEL KASSIS

REF: (A) STATE 268703, (B) BEIRUT 8377

1. SUMMARY. DURING CHARGE'S MEETING WITH MARONITE CLERGY LED BY CHARBEL KASSIS, ON NOV 6, THEY EXPRESSED DEEP SUSPICIONS OF MUSLIM AND PARTICULARLY SYRIAN INTENTIONS TOWARDS LEBANON AND DETERMINATION TO PRESERVE AUTONOMOUS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. CHARGE CALLED ON PERE CHARBEL KASSIS, SUPERIOR OF THE LEBANESE ORDER OF MARONITE MONKS, AT THE KASLIK MONASTERY ON NOV 6. KASSIS HAD ASSEMBLED FIVE OTHER MARONITE RELIGIOUS FIGURES FOR THIS MEETING: FATHER MICHEL WAKIM, SUPERIOR, ST. SAVIOR MONKS; ABATI BUTROS AL-KASSI, RECTOR, HOLY SPIRIT UNIVERSITY; FATHER METODIOUS ZUHAYRAN, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ALEPPO MONKS; FATHER 'EMANUEL KHOURI, SECRETARY, LEBANESE MONKS ORDER; FATHER BOULOS N'AMAN, DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF ARTS, HOLY SPIRIT UNIVERSITY.

3. CHARGE OPENED MEETING BY PRESENTING TALKING POINTS REFTEL. MARONITE LEADERS, LED BY KASSIS, IMMEDIATELY STARTED PROBING TO FIND EXTENT OF US SUPPORT. THEY ASKED, FOR EXAMPLE, IF USG WOULD PROVIDE GUARANTEE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF ASF (READ SYRIAN ARMY) AND FOR CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. CHARGE REPLIED THAT
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HE HAD SPOKEN OF OUR SYMPATHY WITH THE CONCERN OF THE

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FOR ITS SELF-IDENTITY, SECURITY AND VIABILITY AND HAD MADE NO MENTION OF GUARANTEES.

4. THE MARONITE CLERICS, LED BY FATHER KASSIS, ARE DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF THE INTENTIONS OF ALL NON-CHRISTIANS. THEY WERE CLEARLY CONCERNED THAT ONCE SYRIAN ASF FORCES HAD TAKEN UP POSITIONS IN CHRISTIAN LEBANON, THEY WOULD NOT LEAVE. WHEN CHARGE MENTIONED THAT ASAD HAD PROMISED TO WITHDRAW HIS TROOPS WHENEVER SARKIS REQUESTED, FATHER KASSIS NOTED THAT SARKIS WAS A COMPROMISE PRESIDENT AND MIGHT NOT HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE THIS DECISION. THEY ALSO QUESTIONED WHETHER THE ASF WOULD REALLY STRIKE AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS, AND PARTICULARLY AGAINST THE REJECTIONISTS, IF THIS WERE NECESSARY TO RESTORE ORDER. PERE KASSIS REMARKED THAT THE RIYADH AND CAIRO AGREEMENTS WERE THE FIRST CONCERNING LEBANON THAT DID NOT HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEE.

5. IN DISCUSSING THEIR IDEAS FOR THE LEBANON OF THE FUTURE, THE MARONITE CLERICS REVIEWED IN SOME DETAIL THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT LEBANON. THE BALANCE OF 1943 THAT RIYADH AS SOLH HAD HELPED TO CREATE, HAS BEEN BORKEN AND THERE CAN BE NO RETURN . LEBANON MAY CONTINUE TO HAVE TERRITORIAL UNITY BUT NOT A UNITY OF PEOPLE. THE ONLY POSSIBLE OUTCOME OF FUTURE POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS IS SOME FORM OF FEDERATION WHICH ASSURES THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF THE AUTONOMY IT REQUIRES FOR ITS CONTINUED EXISTENCE. THEY THOUGHT THE LEBANESE MUSLIMS WOULD OPPOSE THIS SOLUTION, FIRST BECAUSE THEY WANT TO ACQUIRE COMPLETE POWER IN A UNITED LEBANON, AND SECOND BECAUSE THE CHRISTIANS NOW PAY MOST OF THE TAXES SO THAT A MUSLIM STATE WOULD NOT BE ECONOMICALLY VIABLE.

6. THEY DOUBTED THE LEBANESE MUSLIMS WOULD NEGOTIATE IN GOOD FAITH AS LEBANESE AND FEARED THEY WOULD SEEK OUTSIDE SUPPORT FROM OTHER ARAB MUSLIM COUNTRIES AS THEY HAVE DONE IN THE PAST. THE VERY NATURE OF ISLAM REQUIRES MUSLIMS TO MAKE WAR AGAINST CHRISTIANS WHEN THEY CAN, AND THE MUSLIMS CANNOT THEREFORE BE TRUSTED. CONFIDENTIAL

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THIS INCLUDES OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES, WHICH WANT INSTABILITY IN LEBANON FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES.

7. FATHER KASSIS EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON WHERE, HE SAID, A FEW PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS, PARTICULARLY IRAQIS, COULD DELIBERATELY STAGE RAIDS INTO ISRAEL PROVOKING ISRAELI REPRISALS THAT WOULD IN TURN PLUNGE THE WHOLE AREA INTO

WAR. HE WONDERED WHY UN TROOPS COULD NOT BE STATIONED
ALONG THE LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER TO PREVENT THIS AS
THEY HAD BEEN IN OTHER AREAS.

8. IN CLOSING, SEVERAL OF THE MARONITE CLERGY
EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR USG SUPPORT OF CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY AND HOPE THAT US WOULD CONTINUE TO ATTACH
MORE IMPORTANCE TO MORAL VALUES REPRESENTED BY
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON THAN TO PETRODOLLARS.
FATHER KASSIS MENTIONED HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE UNITED
STATES WITH CHARLES MALIK AND REFERRED TO RECENT
STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER ON LEBANON AND
THE MIDDLE EAST (REF B).

9. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE MARONITE CLERGY
PRESENT APPEARED CONVINCED THAT NO MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATION
OR COMPROMISE WITH MUSLIMS IS POSSIBLE, PERE KASSIS
IS A MAN OF WIDER SCOPE. HIS DEDICATION IS NO LESS
THAN THEIRS, BUT HE HAS SEEN MORE OF THE WORLD.
GIVEN HIS POSITION IN THE POWERFUL MARONITE CLERGY,
HE HAS GREAT POTENTIAL INFLUENCE AMONG THE POPULATION
OF CHRISTIAN BANON.
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